Common Core Standards Workgroup Review of K-12 Standards

A Report by the Appalachia Regional Comprehensive Center
for the Kentucky Department of Education

Purpose and Participants

The Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) convened the third meeting of Common Core Standards workgroups in Frankfort, Kentucky, on January 27 and 28, 2009. The language arts group met January 28 and the mathematics group met January 27 to review mostly complete and nearly final drafts of the *K-12 Common Core Standards,* an initiative of the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center). Each content group was represented by 20 to 25 participants from elementary, middle, and high schools, as well as colleges and businesses from various regions of the state.

Claudia Runge of the Appalachia Regional Comprehensive Center (ARCC) at Edvantia served as facilitator for the review sessions, and KDE staff served as facilitators and note takers for small, grade-level-specific breakout groups.

Process

After Runge's welcoming comments and introductions, Michael Miller, director of KDE's Division of Curriculum Development, shared the purpose for the day's work and reviewed the day's agenda with participants. KDE staff provided an overview of the latest iterations of the *Common Core Standards* (CCS). Participants divided into grade-level groups (elementary, middle, high school, and postsecondary) to review the standards for their levels. Groups were asked to compare the CCS to the current Kentucky standards (using the Combined Curriculum Document) to closely analyze the CCS to determine if they meet the requirements of Senate Bill (SB)1 (2009). In addition, the groups were charged with providing specific evidence of the CCS meeting the SB1 requirements that new standards be more rigorous, more in-depth, clearer, and fewer than the current Kentucky standards. KDE staff recorded their group's work on templates they had designed for the comparison and analysis. At the end of the work period, each group presented the two or three big ideas that they would choose to share with a wider audience.

While groups analyzed and compared standards, Runge interviewed members from each workgroup to capture individual thoughts and opinions about one of these questions, depending on the interviewee's role: *1. How will the Common Core Standards change day-to-day instructional practice in your classroom? 2. How will the Common Core Standards impact your work at the postsecondary level? 3. From an employer's/business standpoint, what do you anticipate will be the effect that the Common Core Standards have on the future?*

At the end of the day, participants took time to reflect on the CCS with members of their grade-level groups, and Michael Miller provided information about next steps that KDE would take in the process to adopt new standards.

Summary of Comparison and Analysis

Mathematics

Reviewers of all levels found ample evidence that the new *Common Core Standards* offer increased rigor, more depth, more clarity and are fewer in number when compared to Kentucky's current standards. Elementary school reviewers noted that direct, grade-by-grade comparisons for K-2 are not feasible since Kentucky's current standards are not broken out by grade at the primary level. However, the reviewers stated that overall they were pleased and supportive of the K – 2 standards found in the CCS.

At Grades 4 through 12, groups analyzed current Kentucky standards, comparing them to the *Common Core*. A few examples of findings follow:

- Grade 3 – The inclusion of verbs such as "describe" and "justify" increase the rigor and move teaching and learning to higher order thinking levels.
- Grade 4 – Also, as an example of more rigor, the CCS calls for students to multiply fractions by whole numbers and multiply whole numbers by fractions. Kentucky's Program of Studies calls for this skill to be taught in fifth grade.
- Grade 5 – CCS require more in-depth learning through fewer standards because of the focus on students' mathematical reasoning, whereas Kentucky's current standards focus on demonstration of a skill.
- Grade 6 – Verbs are clearer and more specific in the CCS. In the standard dealing with ratios, the current Kentucky document uses the terms "develop meaning, describe and apply ratios" whereas the CCS uses the following terms: "multiplicative comparisons, percent of a quantity, unit rate = multiplicative factor."
- Grade 7 – In geometry, the CCS is more rigorous; students are expected to derive formulas, a skill that requires understanding. The corresponding Kentucky standard asks students to describe and provide examples of geometric figures.
- Grade 8 – The CCS more clearly outlines exactly what needs to be taught with coordinate geometry rather than vague language that declares "they're going to be able to use it."
- High school – One demonstration of more rigor in the CCS, which has an entire section devoted to complex numbers, is the lack of attention to complex numbers in current Kentucky standards; also, more rigorous is the inclusion of congruence in the isometric way as compared to just defining congruence as is seen in Kentucky's Core Content.
- High school – In the CC standard "Summarizing and interpreting categorical, count and measurement data," three current Kentucky standards are condensed into one standard that goes into more depth than the current Kentucky standards.

English language arts

English language arts (ELA) reviewers, like their counterparts in mathematics, found in the CCS examples of increased rigor, depth, and clarity, as well as fewer standards overall. Reviewers generally felt that CCS writing standards suffered in some areas when compared to Kentucky's current writing standards. For example, at the early elementary levels, the writing process is not included in the CCS.

- Elementary – The CCS provide a narrow menu for writing in Grades 2 and 3. This translates to a more narrow focus for teachers and more specificity in expectations for the student. Writing expectations are specifically laid out, providing a deeper, narrower focus.
- Elementary – In fourth- and fifth-grade writing, the CCS are more cohesive and will make it easier for teachers to understand and follow the expectations of the standards.
- Elementary – Children will be able to craft a better narrative because the new standards specify a narrower focus and are more in-depth.
- Middle school – The CCS are more rigorous when they address vocabulary standards with specific skills, not just spelling.
- Middle school – Writing and Research are combined in the CCS to provide fewer, more in-depth standards in those areas.
- Middle school – The CCS more clearly identify grammar and usage skills needed; the current Kentucky standards vaguely require "correct grammar and usage."
- High school – The English standards are truly readable for anyone who wants to pick them up. The English standards have some technical language (i.e., thesis statement), but nothing that most people couldn't understand or formulate a meaning from.
- High school – Postsecondary people are going to be very pleased with these new standards. This will really prepare students for college-level work.
- High school – The new curriculum document presents language development in a much more straightforward manner. Five standards are dedicated to mechanics in the CCS. In the current standards, there is no real focus on mechanics; the current standards just refer to "correct conventions."

Summary of Interviews

Interviews of reviewers captured individuals' thoughts as to how the *Common Core Standards*, if adopted by Kentucky, will change the daily work of K-12 teachers, postsecondary teachers, and business people. Some quotes from the interviews are included here:

Teachers' comments about the Common Core mathematics standards:

- The CCS will allow elementary teachers more time to teach understanding of numbers vs. simple procedures. Teachers will need training to understand the required depth of knowledge in math.

- Classrooms will be more student centered and learning centered—rather than teacher centered.
- Students will be more involved in discovering math rather than receiving formulas or procedures.
- Instruction will be slower paced; teachers won't be rushing through each lesson to get to the next lesson.
- The CCS seem more cohesive, with a clear progression in place, than the ones we have now; they will make me look at the longer term (e.g., themes at grade levels in middle school, building on what was learned the previous year; learning, then using, and applying.)
- The CCS are rigorous, but reachable. The list of standards is comprehensive and specific compared to the current Kentucky standards.

Postsecondary comments about CC math standards:

- The CC standards will help the high-school-to-college transition.
- Modeling in the high-school-level standards will help build students' problem-solving skills.

Business/industry representative comments about CC math standards:

- The CC standards, if met, will produce students who will have a deeper understanding of math and practical applications.
- The modeling piece in the CC standards gets to real-world applications—but how we attain these standards will be important.

Teachers' comments about the Common Core English language arts standards:

- The cross-cutting standards will be very helpful to teachers for planning units; the standards will help teachers know what to cover.
- The CCS will develop continuity. Parents will love them. Our county is already discussing mapping to the new standards.
- The grade-by-grade expectations in primary will be very helpful to many teachers. The CCS provides more guidance than in the past.
- The teaching approach will be similar with the CCS; the formatting is clear and will be well received.
- The CCS will provide more of a laser focus (e.g., grammar and usage specify a clear focus on goals that need to be met grade by grade in middle school). The standards eliminate repetition, and students are more likely to master skills instead of being taught the same thing over and over.
- I like the reading list and the attention to reader and reading. It will challenge teachers to tackle some more difficult texts and will give to me texts for comparing what we're reading in my classroom.
- Kentucky teachers have done a good job with teaching writing so the writing standards in the CCS won't be a stretch for our teachers.
- Speaking and listening standards are clearer than those in the current Program of Studies. The new standards will clarify expectations grade level by grade level.

- The CCS are organized in a nice, tight conscious buildup. They will encourage me to have conversations with teachers before and after my grade.
- Overall, teachers will be much more reflective about why we're doing things.

Post-secondary comments about CC English language arts standards:

- This CCS document is clearer; for beginning teachers it will be easier to see the progression for K-12.
- Primary, foundational reading skills are laid out exactly as kids need to know them.
- The CCS will be good guidelines for helping initial certification and graduate folks know how to plan lessons.
- The CCS will provide linkages from kindergarten to postsecondary.
- For my work, the CCS will allow me to be more rigorous in what I teach. My students will learn more complex strategies so they can continue and succeed in any 4-year college.